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ABSTRACT

This discussion of second language instruction through subject-area content reviews trends and literature in the field. Content-based language instruction is defined and distinguished from other forms of language instruction. Three major types of college-level content-based language instruction are described: sheltered instruction, taught by a content-area specialist, in which students are segregated from native speakers of the target language; adjunct courses, combining participation in a sheltered class with participation in a non-sheltered content-area class; and theme-based instruction, the most common, in which the curriculum is developed using different topics or themes. Design of the content-based instructional module is outlined, noting and discussing these elements or characteristics: use of language skills just at or above students' current linguistic level; interesting and non-trivial content; content face validity for some valued discourse community; potential for sequencing instruction; potential to stimulate and lead to a variety of treatments and concatenated learning tasks; high attraction; potential for input from a variety of sources; potential to stimulate critical analysis; allowance for possibility of cognitive dissonance among inputs; and teacher-developed where feasible. Examples of college-level content-based language programs are noted. The feasibility of content-based language instruction in high schools is explored briefly. Contains 7 references. (MSE)

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An Overview of Content-Based Language Instruction

John S. Marani
July 1998

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I. Introduction

Content-based language education is becoming more prevalent at the university level. Over 65% of American colleges and universities have adopted content-based courses or programs of some kind (Snow et al., 1989), ranging from single courses in one particular department to complete programs, i.e. Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum.To date. the research has indicated that students in these classes do as well or better than their counterparts in skills-based classes. In a study of two French Civilization classes at the University of Indiana, Lafayette and Buscaglia (1985):

> reported language gains comparable to those of students in skills-based courses at the same level that used a French Civilization textbook, even though the experimental course offered no explicit grammar or other language instruction. The students completing the experimental course also reported more favorable attitudes toward language study. (Ryan et al., 1993).

The idea that content-based courses can create "more favorable attitudes toward language study" may explain the rise in popularity these types of courses at the university level. By improving student attitudes about second language (L2) study, students are more likely to continue to study other languages. Even if students never become fluent in the language in which the content-based class is taught, this attitudinal change may influence a student's conscious decision to learn another language later. In this manner, content-based language education makes a long-term investment in the student.

There are, however, many problems that content-based language education presents that make it more difficult to implement, staff, and maintain courses and programs. The whole focus

of the course has changed. The term "Skills-based courses" refers to any L2 courses using materials that focus on learning certain skills, like buying a train ticket or ordering a meal in a restaurant; since students, especially non-language majors, have become accustomed to these kind of classes, it may be a difficult adjustment. In addition, due to the focus on content, the instructor will need to have not only a working knowledge of the L2, but a thorough knowledge of the subject matter that is being taught. This reality would make it difficult for many large universities--particularly those who use Teaching Assistants as their primary instructors for undergraduate language courses--to secure qualified personnel to teach these classes. Another concern is funding. Since authentic materials are an essential part of any content-based course, startup costs may be high, and there is no reliable way to measure "more favorable attitudes toward language study". Consequently, administrators may decide that the end does not justify the financial means, because it would be hard to prove that the course is doing what it sets out to do.

II. Definition of Content-Based Language Instruction

Before addressing the important questions that can be raised from a discussion of this topic, it is important to have a clear definition of content-based language instruction. Hassel (1991) defines the topic in this manner, using content-based English as a Second Language (ESL) as her point of reference:

> Content-based ESL instruction is the integration of linguistic and content material for the purposes of acquiring a second language in an academic setting (Sutorius, 1985). Snow, Brinton and Wesche (1989) describe it as the integration of a specific content with language teaching objectives. They encourage the use of academic texts as a means of

> providing a context for teaching linguistic structures and functions. Since content-based focuses on academic content, it aids in the development of the cognitive and linguistic skills necessary for academic success (Sutorius, 1985). In summary, content-based ESL is an effective method of integrating content matter instruction with English language instruction for the purposes of facilitating second language acquisition and academic success.

Although Hassel's definition is sound, there are certain points that were not addressed that are worthy of mention. First, content-based language courses increase the motivation of the students because they are interested in studying the content that the course presents. It is this increased motivation that aids in the acquisition process.

Secondly, these courses help students to see the utility of the language, something lacking from task-based courses. If an L2 learner acquires a specialized vocabulary in the target language, then s/he will be able to use it in a non-academic setting, such as a work environment in a country where the target language is spoken. Hassel focuses more on the academic success that can be achieved through content-based instruction.

Finally, the students gain an insight into the target culture as well as a specialized vocabulary. Through the use of authentic materials, students see the subject matter as the native speaker would; since these cultural references are not removed or modified (as they might be in an American textbook), it allows the learner to deepen his/her knowledge of the culture.

III. How Does Content-Based Language Instruction Differ From Other Methods?

Two important features differentiate content-based language instruction from other more traditional methods. In content-based language instruction, content is the focus of the course. This would seem obvious, but what is more important is the principle behind it. Snow et al. (1989) sums it up:

> ...successful language learning occurs when students are presented with target language material in a meaningful, contextualized form with the primary focus on acquiring information. A second shared feature concerning the twofold aim of the models in using authentic tasks and materials. In these models, the content-based activities accurately reflect the types of academic demands placed upon students, and aim to meet student needs.

Snow highlights the idea that language learning is enhanced in a *meaningful, contextualized* form. That is not to say that language is not meaningful in and of itself. When we use a general L2 textbook to teach a language class, the overall form of the class may be dictated by the textbook. Typical L2 materials are usually organized into chapters by grammar points and performing certain tasks, such as describing your family or going on a trip. Although the tasks may well be authentic, the materials are not. The course focuses on many different tasks, but there is nothing to tie all of these activities together so that students may find the knowledge useful and meaningful.

But Kramsch (1991) highlights the danger of using "authentic contexts", an item of particular importance to content-based language teaching. She concludes that authentic texts are

used in such a way that they are in fact *decontextualized* from the L2, then *reconextulalized* into a form that is used in the American classroom:

> "We have in fact recontextulaized the foreign discourse, but into another culture-the culture of the American classroom. Communication strategies are practiced in group interaction, grammatical exercises are 'contextualized' by a one-sentence situational lead-in, authentic materials are used as a springboard for discussing larger cultural issues. Nevertheless, two constraints have been implicitly imposed on this recontextualization. Foreign discourse is now being observed, discussed and practiced from an American cultural perspective and through American educational values."

The content-based approach to language education addresses this concern through a careful and educated choice of authentic materials. By using authentic materials as the primary resources in the classroom, in addition to American materials expressly written for the L2 learner, recontextualization is limited; an authentic text will reflect the societal views of the field being studied in the target culture without the biases of an American author or editor. Thus, students have more cultural insight into the field being studied. This also may aid student comprehension of the target culture, since "sociolinguistic markers" in a task-based textbook must be identified and classified according to use. In an authentic text, they are presented to the L2 learner as they are presented to the native speaker:

Most of the materials used in content-based language courses are chosen and adapted for classroom use by the instructor. Authentic materials are used, but in some cases a professor who teaches the same content-language course often will compile the information and produce a packet or book for their students. If these materials are selected by the professor or invented using ideas from authentic texts, it will help to ensure their usefulness in the classroom.

Another important point that all of the types of content-based language instruction have in common is their "primary focus on acquiring information". In typical L2 classes, we would like our students to acquire information, but the emphasis is on the performance of certain tasks. Students enrolled in these more traditional task-based courses are expected to be able to order dinner, give directions and describe themselves in the L2. A fact that may be forgotten at times is that students are also interested in cultural knowledge, which is often considered only a secondary goal. Through the content portion of the course, students gain cultural knowledge through the tasks they are assigned. For example, students learn about French business customs and are asked to write French business letters, or they study German philosophers while learning how to construct a plausible argument in German.

IV. Types of Content-Based Language Courses

There are three major types of content-based education classes in use today at the university level: **sheltered, adjunct** and **theme-based.** Theme-based courses are the most widely used, but an understanding of the differences between the different types of content-based courses is necessary. There are instances where one type might be favored over another for design reasons.

Sheltered content-based language courses are taught by a **content**-area specialist in the L2. They are so named because the students in the class are:

> "sheltered" from native-speaking students. This sheltered arrangement puts all second-language learners in 'the same linguistic boat', thereby enabling them, it is believed, to benefit from the adjustments and simplifications made by native-speakers in communication with second-language learners (Krashen, 1981), and from a low-anxiety situation (Snow et al. 1989).

Adjunct content-based courses are really two courses in one. L2 learners are placed in a sheltered language class in which they focus on the language used in the field, while at the same time they are enrolled in another class, a content class, that they take with native and non-native L2 speakers.

Theme-based instruction courses are L2 classes in which the curriculum is developed using different topics, or themes. They are the most widely used form of content-based instruction because of their easy adaptability to almost any language program. Even though these courses may require much more work on the part of the instructor, it is possible to achieve amazing results:

> Unlike traditional language classes, where the choice of topic is determined by the selection of a textbook, materials in theme-based courses are usually teacher-generated or adapted from outside sources, and an attempt is often made to integrate the topic into the teaching of all skills. As such, in theme-based courses, students often move to higher levels of language processing (e.g. comparison, separating fact from opinion) through the variety of text types, formats and activities to which they are exposed. (Snow et al, 1989)

The area of theme-based courses can be further divided. If the instructor desires, s/he can build the course around more than one topic that is unrelated. An example of this would be a course called " 20th Century French Society", in which students learn about issues affecting French society today, such as unemployment, the European Community, and the educational system. The title of the course and its content would still be the focus, but different topics would be emphasized during the semester to give the students a broader scope.

On the other hand, if the instructor prefers one theme for the entire semester, that too is possible. Usually, these are for more specialized topics that the instructor would cover in greater detail. For example, a course on German business could focus on a variety of activities designed to further enhance the student's understanding of the cultural and practical application of the information conveyed. Some of these activities could include writing German business letters, filling out German job applications or writing a suitable German résumé. At the same time, the students could be reading German newspapers for economic trends, learning German business etiquette and studying the differences between the German and American management styles.

V. Martin's Design Aspects of the Content-Based Module

Martin (1990) uses the idea of context to break down content-based language education "modules" into two groups: context non-specific and context-specific. Although the difference may seem small, the choice will have a tremendous impact on the learner and based upon the goals and resources available. He elaborates:

> "Modules may be (a) context non-specific, or (b) context-specific.
> In the first case, they are simply designed according to general pedagogical and second-language learning principles and may be targeted to general-purpose language-learners of specific-purpose learners. Modules of the first type are typically designed by language teachers without specialist knowledge of the subject matter being treated. In the second case, the module's design may be sensitive to the methodology, preferring learning modes and cognitive landscape of a specific discourse community. These are true ESP [English for Special Purposes] modules. aimed at a well-defined, relatively homogeneous learner population, and are typically designed by language teachers possessing specialist knowledge in the field in question or by language teachers in conjunction with a subject specialist."

The choice of which module to be implemented would depend on the departmental mission to which the language department ascribes. If the department focuses on exceptional education to those students in the department who are studying language as a part of the university curriculum, then the module would be the former. This is an adaptable module for "general-purpose learners", who do not require a content-area specialist because they do not intend to use the language in their careers. An example of this would be students who are fulfilling a university- or state-imposed language requirement.

On the other hand, if the department wants to improve the quality of its department specialists, it would choose the latter. A Language for Special Purposes class, by its very nature, would function better in this role, as the instructor is a content specialist or working in conjunction with a content-area specialist. Given the fact that authentic language in context has not been designed expressly for the L2 learner, it would seem more difficult, and thus more at the level of the language specialist or the general learner who wants a challenge and is extremely motivated.

This LSP module would also work well for students who are not language specialists per se, but whose interest lies in using the target language in a given field. These students usually want to work in an L2 environment, or live/work in the target country. The in-depth look at language in context would be essential for them if they are to succeed in their chosen field in the L2. An example of this student would be one who majors in International Business.

Martin gives us a list of additional important points to consider when designing a content-based module, and it is of particular interest to our study as it will allow us to investigate the validity of the methodology and to discuss some potential problems.

1) It should be potentially comprehensible, i.e., at or just beyond the learner's linguistic (including schematic) level.

This is a very important point. It stresses that the input be "comprehensible", as Krashen presents in his Monitor Model (1981). If the students do not understand the input, then they will become frustrated and linguistic breakdown may occur. Martin reinforces this idea:

> "Input texts which are 'authentic' for (idealized) native speakers or those 'discourse community club members'--native or non-native speakers--who would be familiar with concepts in the field may **not be authentic** for particular learners."

Martin's intent is to alert the content-based program designer to be very careful about materials selection for a content-based class; authenticity is closely linked to the idea of comprehensibility. For example, if a class of fourth-year L2 students is exposed to a scientific journal in the L2, it is possible that the text may not even be viewed as authentic by some learners because their proficiency in the L2 is not at the level of the text that has been chosen.

2) It [the subject of the course] should be potentially interesting or** non-trivial **to learners.

If a content-based course deals with something that is trivial, uninteresting, or considered useless by the learner, then the course will not be able to achieve its goals of increasing content knowledge and increasing L2 proficiency and cultural awareness. If a course, such as "L'Anatomie de la mouche" (The Anatomy of the Housefly) was offered, it might attract many future entomologists from the life sciences department/college of the university. They may find the course invaluable to their careers if they wanted to work in the sciences in a French-speaking part of the world.

This is an extreme case, but it helps us understand the consequences of choosing a content-based course subject that is extremely limited in scope. It would probably be very hard to find materials to hold a class with this title; authentic materials would have to be gleaned from French textbooks on the subject and pasted together. In addition, it would be very hard to find

someone to teach the class, unless the university in question had a French-speaking entomologist on the staff in the life sciences department. Finally, after all of the time and money spent just so that the class could be offered, there might be so few students signed up for it that it would end up being cancelled.

In addition, a course with this title would probably be considered trivial by learners. Students interested in studying the life sciences in French would probably rather take courses dealing with the cell, plants, genetics and animal physiology, which constitute the basic courses offered in their own department. In this manner, they would be able to learn the basics of vocabulary in the field and become a member of the discourse community.

In addition to these concerns, the cultural importance of a course such as "The Anatomy of the Housefly" is minimal at best. Martin says that the content may deal with content which is salient in their local, regional, national environment; or, if not, it may deal with material that encourages learners to "think globally, act locally". Some such subjects could include the dangers of nuclear power and its effect on the environment and AIDS research. This is not to say that these courses would not be a challenge; the interest level of the students, and hopefully their motivation level, would be much higher.

It would be appropriate to mention here the paramount importance of student need in content-based programs. Savignon (1982) describes six important tenets in communicative language teaching. One of these in particular to content-based language instruction:

> L2 learning, like L1 learning, begins with the needs and interests of the **learner**.

Content-based language courses may help to fulfill the needs of these students in many ways. Perhaps the most important is the content itself. For people who fall under the category of using a L2 for professional/career purposes, these course can make the difference between being hired or passed over by a prospective employer.

However, it cannot be said that content-based language classes are only for these people, who represent a fraction of those students taking a L2 at the university level. Since the emphasis and the assessment of the course will be on the content and not on the language, students will learn about a subject that they may be studying in English, or a subject about which they know nothing. In either case, the student goes away with content knowledge, not just linguistic knowledge.

Finally, it allows students to become more culturally aware. In many L2 textbooks, for example, the "culture" is a small part of the book. The focus is on learning the language, and for an instructor to teach the students about "culture" requires extra effort and time that is usually not allotted for this purpose on the syllabus of a task-based L2 course. In a content-based class, the content and the materials are full of cultural references about the behavior and speech patterns of a certain L2 "discourse community" (Kramsch, 1981). Culture per se could not be separated from the text, and it would be explained and discussed throughout the course.

Student need and interest is in effect why content-based language programs exist. The reason is simple, but vital: Students like content-based courses (Martin, 1991). They offer a challenge, but more than that they also provide something that the students can "take with them". University students are finding themselves having to fulfill an increasing number of university and departmental requirements than ever before; for this reason, students would like to take

courses that will be useful when they leave. Since most students do not anticipate being in a German restaurant or in a French grocery store, task-based courses are seen by some students as not being very practical.

The fact that these courses seem useful to college students motivates them. Because they want to learn the subject matter, the language becomes less of an issue; although the class is taught in the target language, the focus is on learning the material and not on the language. This increased motivation may lead to what Lafayette and Bucscaglia were referring when they stated that the French Civilization class in their experiment had more positive attitudes toward language study. As previously mentioned, it cannot be measured, but if these courses are changing attitudes about L2 study by students, then that is valid reason for introducing them into a program that already exists.

There is a danger that if these courses were offered too early in a L2 program, they might hinder the learner when s/he enters the target country. For example, if a student were just taught Business French, then they may lack the necessary vocabulary to survive in a Francophone country. It is important to recognize that task-based courses and content-based courses should be used together to make a L2 program successful. Learners need to be able to communicate with native speakers who are not necessarily members of the 'discourse community' to which the content-based course is giving them access and see to their personal needs, i.e. getting food, finding a place to live, etc.

Also, offering these classes prematurely would be counterproductive for the students. Since authentic materials, or instructor-generated texts based on authentic materials, are used, L2 learners who have not had enough time to acquire the basics of grammar and vocabulary will not

be able to understand the material. The instructor would constantly be explaining points that should have already been learned, taking away from the overall goal of the course: to deepen the L2 learner's knowledge of the subject matter, and, because it is being studied in the target language, emphasize the cultural aspects of the subject matter in one or more of the target countries.

3) It should have content face-validity with respect to the knowledge (schemata) held by some valued discourse community (local-national or inter/supranational) with respect to the same topic. Putting this another way, it should contribute to actual or potential "club membership" into such a discourse community.

If content-based classes will be used by L2 learners in their careers, they will need to be able to speak about the subject matter accurately and in great detail. This is especially important in subjects such as molecular biology, computer science, and aerospace engineering. A content-based class should be preparing students for this 'community membership', even though many of the students may not ever work in the target country/countries; there is a great need for people who possess knowledge of a second language **and** are highly skilled in their respective fields in this country who deal with native speakers of the L2 on a daily basis.

But it goes further than just teaching the specialized vocabulary in context. We should be enabling students to get the information they need on the subject matter in the target country or countries by furnishing them with a "tool kit" of cultural knowledge of the subject matter in the L2. To this end, students will need information on the discourse community in the target country: the locations of the chapters (if there are more than one), and how to get in touch with them; any important industry publications, so that students may keep up with what is happening in the field;

the process of becoming a member of this community (if an actual membership process exists); how to present research; and important figures in the field in the target language are just a few examples of this. Of course, these will need to be modified according to the complexity and cultural facets of the subject that is being taught.

4) It should posess sequential potential, leading the learner cumulatively over the course of the module (and beyond, hopefully) into greater depth of understanding of the topic.

The instructor is the person who can make the material sequential for the learner, through careful organization of lessons and a syllabus that reflects this structure. A poorly designed content-based course could become nothing more than the teaching of vocabulary without any particular framework. This is particularly dangerous if a theme-based course is offered that covers many different topics throughout the semester. That is not to discourage these types of classes; they must be organized in such a way that the lessons are linked together as much as possible.

This can also be achieved through the choice of materials. An instructor will want to choose materials that can be linked with those of other lessons to show a progression of thoughts and ideas.

5) It should serve as a stimulus for and easily lead in to a variety of treatments and concatenated learning tasks (both text-focused and permitting "jumping off from text").

Martin makes an important distinction between the two kinds of learning tasks he mentions. Emphasizing the fact that the exercises should be linked together in a chain (concatenated), he draws our attention to those activities that are text-focused and those that are used by jumping off from the text.

Text-focused activities would use a text that is given to students as the primary basis for the activity. For example, in a German Business Class, advanced students might be given a balance sheet or an income statement from a German company. As a text-focused activity, the students may be asked get into groups and discuss whether the company is making or losing money, or to report on and talk about any of the data, and then discuss their findings in front of their class in an exposé.

On the other hand, "jumping off from text" activities are used when the instructor wants to highlight a certain issue using a text, and then use the article as a jumping off point for a debate or a discussion. In that same German Business Class, advanced students might be given a article written by a union leader on the massive percentage of absenteeism in German companies. After having read the article, the students could have an open discussion of the issue, with the instructor acting as a guide and giving the students questions to consider to stimulate the conversation. It is important to note, however, that the emphasis is placed on the students; if the instructor lectures without student input, the students may become uninterested.

6) It should have a high "magnetic" value and be capable of attracting "found" inputs to it (e.g., inputs from the media, conversational culture, etc.)

It should be made clear to the students that language is not used in a vacuum; as they become more and more familiar with their discourse community, these inputs will grow steadily in importance. It could be said that their importance is twofold: linguistic and cultural. For the former, they use the vocabulary and idiomatic expressions that the students are learning, which in turn should reinforce these concepts for them. The media often deals with events that directly affect the fields in question; thus, news programs, talk shows and documentaries will be excellent inputs for the students.

From a cultural standpoint, news shows and video clips contain useful information that give insight into societal views on the subject in question. For example, a French society class might see a video clip of a talk show in which the discussion centers on the French Women's movement. From there, a discussion of the issue might ensue, or an exploration of the history of the French Women's movement by the instructor.

This concept can be closely associated with that of the next guideline:

7) It should be drawn from a variety of sources: inputs may be spoken/print media, may cater to popular/academic audiences, may presuppose no/lay/specialist/expert background knowledge, may be 'live' or not, may be computerized or not (in which case, it may be interactive or not). In Glendon's program, we have a particular bias for multi-modal input:

--film (biased) + text (balanced) + live lecture (biased against the film) ([Subject:]'the ozone layer')
--lecture (balanced, frame-setting) + field trip + student oral presentation
([Subject: Canadian Landscape Art)
--field trip + lab work + textbook chapter ([Subject:] natural science topic)
--case study + textbook chapter + lecture-discussion ([Subject:] management science topic)
--popular science article + film + expert lecture ([Subject:] ape language)
--video + simulation game + library research + student oral presentations + field trip
([Subject:] native-white relations in Canada).

Using the language for a variety of activities is important for task-based classes, but is even more crucial for content-based classes, due to the heavy emphasis placed on learning the language in context. Since the utility of the L2, specifically the 'applied' language mission, is stressed here, students should be able to communicate in a wide variety of situations in the discourse community. Different activities will make the students more prepared to tackle many problems in more than one way, which will definitely be to their benefit in an L2 environment.

Guideline 8 and 9 are closely linked together, so it would make sense to mention them at the same time:

8) It should stimulate critical analysis of bias/viewpoint/opinion/value-orientation of the inputs. Inputs are both to be built up and deconstructed, so that the learners [do] not remain in a passive stance or be overwhelmed by the input; the process of transformation of input to intake to learner output is paramount.

9) It should allow for the possibility of cognitive dissonance among the inputs. There are many cases of lectures providing quite opposing views to those contained in the textbook chapter.[...] The dissonance and uncertainty created a lot of cognitive tension from which some very good argumentation developed.

This helps to develop effective reasoning among the learners. By varying the input to reflect a wide variety of opinions, it gives the class a much wider scope; if the L2 learners are going to be working in the language, they will hear differences of opinion in the target language. This will help them to recognize these forms when they leave the classroom. Moreover, it will be important for them to identify the differences in the way people express the idea of "maybe" or "I don't know", or even, "I'm not informed enough to make a decision on the subject." The opinions of most individuals go far beyond "yes" and "no", and this real-world attitude will make students ready for these frequent encounters with native speakers.

Finally, Guideline 10 talks about the overall attitude that should be taken with regard to materials and course continuity:

10) It should be teacher-developed (wherever feasible, in conjunction with language teachers and subject specialists), kept as one of a module-bank of materials and activities, and continually refreshed and re-evaluated. If the theme and topic is generative, new input texts will suggest themselves and be included in the module package.

This is perhaps the most difficult of all of the guidelines to achieve, but one of the most important if a continued content-based module is to be successful. In addition to all of the responsibilities that instructors have when teaching a task-based L2 course, including making up exams and quizzes, correcting papers, creating a syllabus, choosing materials and making up lesson plans, content-based classes make the instructor's job more complex in a variety of ways. First, when using a task-based textbook, there is usually an accompanying "test bank" from which quizzes, exams or activities may be generated. Because the instructor has to compile the materials from authentic materials, or generate them by him/herself using authentic materials as a base, there are none of these aids; all of the work falls to the instructor.

Secondly, depending on the course that is being taught, the instructor will have to be familiar with not only the language, but with the content as well. This is a reason why it is difficult for larger universities who have most or all of their undergraduate courses handled by teaching assistants to implement content-based programs: Teaching assistants will most likely not possess the content knowledge to teach the class effectively by themselves.

There are three ways to get around this difficult problem. One is to hire a content-specialist who is a native speaker of the L2 in question. This is the most expensive solution, albeit the best one to fix the problem permanently, and one that will be hard to justify to administrators. Depending on the subject, it will most likely be difficult to find such a person. Even if a suitable person can

be found, and assuming that the person is interested in such a position, it will be a challenge to sell the idea to many language departments. The end result--that is, to train a fraction of the student population while expending a lot of very precious monetary resources--would not justify the cost and time it would take to fill the position.

Another less expensive and easier way to get qualified instructors would be to train teaching assistants in the subject matter during the first year of their MA/Ph.D. program. They could take the subject in addition to teaching beginning language classes, and it would be considered part of their mandatory training. However, assistants tend to have a lot of requirements to fill in a very short time and may not like the idea of having to take two extra classes just so they can teach content-based courses. Also, it would require inter-departmental coordination, which is very difficult to arrange and is labor-intensive for administrators and faculty. Despite these considerations, it would be to the assistants' benefit to get the extra training and they would be able to list this specialty on their C.V.

The third approach would be to coordinate with other departments and have the course supervised by a content-area specialist, while the L2 instructor oversees the day-to-day operations of the class itself. Again, this would require the approval and consideration of different departments. Add to all this confusion the fact that many universities that are in financial difficulty would not be able to pay the content area specialist for his/her time, and it is easy to see that although this solution seems like it may be the most feasible, there is no easy way to find personnel to teach these classes.

After a suitable instructor is found, s/he will have to work hard every day to keep the class interesting, so as not to lose students. But a more imposing task lies in the "refreshing" of

the module. This means that every semester, the module will have to be examined, changed and updated to include any new developments in the field. Needless to say, the instructor will have to be a very motivated, organized and intelligent individual to keep up with all of these changes without being frustrated or losing interest.

VI. Some Examples of Content-Based Programs

An example of a theme-based course which was done in 1993 at Brown University was called "Japanese Culture and Society". It is an anthropology course that has always been taught in English. The reason behind the decision to offer one of the sections of the course in Japanese is important for our study of theme-based L2 instruction:

"It has been our feeling for some years that the students at our institution have been choosing to study foreign languages for somewhat different reasons than students of one or two decades ago. Students today are increasingly studying foreign languages to prepare for traditional careers rather than to become foreign-area specialists. Thus students planning to become engineers, lawyers, or businesspersons enroll in Arabic, Japanese, or traditional European languages with the thought that fluency in these languages will make them better-equipped for and more competitive in these professions." (Ryan et al, 1993)

These professors felt that student needs at their university were not being met. Their reaction was to create a theme-based topics course in Japanese Culture and Society. Some of the topics that were covered during the semester, with one topic per week, included religion, sex and gender, traditional village life, and modernization and its social effects. Some of the topics lasted longer than one week.

When choosing materials, they based their selection on three important criteria: relevance, interest, and difficulty. They chose materials that fourth-year students of Japanese language would be able to understand. They chose many of their readings from the young readers section of a large Japanese bookstore in New York, including modern fiction.

It is interesting to note that the instructor dominated the conversation in the class for the first few weeks. To focus more on the students, she started assigning questions with the readings and asked two people to do an expose during each class.

The results are encouraging. Students are enjoying the course, and a marked improvement in their Japanese language and culture skills has been noted. It works well with the interest of the students, and, according to the co-founder of the program, the program, adds "...dimensions that are not normally covered in those [referring to civilization and literature] courses."

Another interesting program exists at the University of Rhode Island, where their International Engineering Program (IEP) has had much success. The IEP extends the four-year engineering program from four to five years, but students work toward two degrees simultaneously: a B.S. in the engineering discipline of their choice and B.A. in German. The students are sheltered from German majors for the first six courses. They are given a thorough grounding in technical German, including mathematics, calculus and energy. The courses have a "scientific flavor" at the outset but become more and more content-specific as the students' fluency increases. However, the German that the students will need in social situations is by no means neglected.

One of the highlights of the program is the internship opportunities the students have to work for a period of time in German companies based in Rhode Island. The employers have been very pleased with their URI interns and in some cases students are hired by these companies after graduation. The results when the students take courses in German universities are outstanding; most of the URI students handle upper level classes with little or no difficulty. This is an

"ongoing experiment", but other universities are interested in researching the possibilities of IEP's at Pennsylvania State University and the University of Maryland.

VII. Content-based programs at the high school level?

Up until this point, my remarks have focused solely on college and university content-based language programs. During my research, the following question was raised often: If college students respond well to these courses, could these courses succeed in motivating high school students toward further language study? In theory, the answer is yes. Many second-language Advanced Placement courses are designed to focus on learning about the culture through authentic materials, for example.

However, such courses would appear to be much more difficult to implement in high schools for many reasons. Perhaps the most relevant of these is the competence of the learners. Many students are only exposed to language study beginning in the ninth grade. Even with two full years of study, a L2 program would have to be extremely rigourous to prepare students in that short period of time for a content-based course. Certainly, there are students who would be qualified and motivated to attempt such a course, but enrollment would most likely by scarce. In addition, the type of content-based courses would be limited to theme-based; trying to schedule an adjunct or sheltered course would be extremely unlikely.

It seems apparent that the time has not yet come for these courses to make their appearance at the high school level. At the same time, if the linguistic competence of students improved significantly before high school, content-based L2 courses might flourish. In several

states, policies have been written that support language study that begins at the kindergarten level; although K-12 L2 study is a lofty goal, it may yet be achieved.

Realistically, however, the greatest challenge to overcome in this endeavor is American ethnocentricity. English has become the *lingua franca* for commerce, science and technology. Until L2 study becomes a priority in the United States as a whole, content-based language courses—and any language course below the high school level—will be perceived by many parents, educators, administrators and policymakers as impractical, wasteful, and unnecessary.

VIII. Conclusion

One of the biggest assets of content-based language instruction is the fact that the possibilities at the university level are virtually limitless, given adequate funding and dedicated instructors. Having said that, and because one might forget the magnitude of such an undertaking, it would be useful here to recall a few of the more important points to ponder when considering implementing such a module.

Of all the factors, **student need** is the most crucial. The main reason that these courses and programs are offered is because students like them (Martin, 1991). To this end, all major decisions, including courses to be taught, dates and times of such courses, and choice of authentic materials should conform to the interest and needs of the learner. Other factors will play a role, such as availability of money or personnel, and sacrifices may have to be made from time to time. However, the needs and interests of the learners should be met whenever possible. The **evaluation** of students in the course(s) is based on the learner's knowledge of the **content**. The assignments in the course should reflect this, giving the learners ample opportunities to discuss and call into question the information that they have acquired. The language and the

content should not be separated; this would defeat one of the main objectives of the course: to improve the student's linguistic ability in the L2 through the content. If, however, the instructor feels that a linguistic point should be presented--to aid in the comprehension of a certain text, for example--s/he should make every effort to use examples from the authentic text that the students are reading, i.e., an instructor of content-based course offered in French may find it necessary to discuss the *passé simple*.

Authentic materials, or instructor-generated classroom materials based on authentic texts, should be the norm. The most important reason for this is because the L2 learners need to be exposed to the language *in context*. When presented in authentic texts, sociolinguistic markers and other linguistic forms are presented as they would be to a native speaker, and thus, not *recontextualized* into an American belief system and reinforcing American educational values (Kramsch, 1991). This is what sometimes occurs when authentic materials are used in task-based classes as a supplement to American-made learning materials. Another reason to choose authentic materials is so that the students gain a greater insight into the target culture. Since we are trying to enable the L2 learner to become part of a discourse community (Kramsch, 1991), they will need to understand any cultural references or customs that are observed in that particular community. An authentic text does not make any effort to explain these references; it is assumed that they are presented to the native speaker. The L2 learner, therefore, will learn about them as a native speaker would, free of any biases from his home culture.When choosing these authentic materials, it is essential that the L2 learner **level** be taken into account. Learners who have not had sufficient exposure to the L2 (and this will vary depending on the language and the

university program) will find learning this way difficult because they have not had enough time to master the basic forms and structure of the language.

The materials that are selected or generated for the class must be just above the level of the students. This ensures that the class is a challenge, but not so difficult that the L2 learners become frustrated. One example that comes to mind is in the Brown University "Japanese Culture and Society" course for fourth-year Japanese students. One set of materials used was popular fiction for young people. These books were not too hard, but at the same time they were moderately challenging for the students. Another dimension that the popular Japanese fiction supplied for the L2 learners was that these books were **interesting** to the students. They received insight into the beliefs and values of Japanese young people through this fiction. It also gave the students a tremendous sense of accomplishment; they were reading Japanese books after a scant four years of study!

The materials should have **conflicting** opinions wherever possible (Martin, 1990). This will make the learners think about both opinions and decide whether they agree or disagree, or to form a different opinion entirely. Also, these differences of opinion will generate class debates and discussion, a good activity for students to practice their language skills in the area of emphasis. Expression of one's opinion is something that students will have to do often, especially if they are working in an L2 environment or living in the target country.

Finally, to ensure that the course continues to address the needs of the learner, it will need to be **updated and re-evaluated on a regular basis** (Martin, 1990). Since the needs of the learners at the university change, the course or program must reflect these changes through additions or deletions of materials, new acquisitions of movies, videos, computer software, etc.,

and changing of the subject of the course if it is no longer popular. For example, if the "20th Century French Society" class was losing popularity, but the instructor has noticed that certain themes in the course generate much more enthusiasm on the part of the students, such as French Art and Music, then the course could add more materials to reflect these changing interests.

Content-based language education poses some very unique problems that must be solved before the semester begins, as we have seen, and is work-intensive on the part of the instructor. However, it should be considered a viable option for intermediate L2 learners. It educates them in the **content**, which is something that they will keep with them no matter what field they enter after their college years. It increases their **linguistic and cultural awareness** in the L2, allowing them to become more proficient in the L2 while learning a specialized vocabulary and penetrating deeply into the target culture.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, content-based language education creates more favorable attitudes toward language study (Lafayette and Bucscaglia, 1990), which is something that will help students long after they leave the classroom. Even though the specific course may not be remembered, it is hoped that the L2 learner will understand and appreciate the cultural and linguistic value of the course, and that they may desire that experience again by continuing to study languages and cultures other than their own.

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